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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 005106

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FOR AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OVIP](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE JUNE 27 VISIT OF AMBASSADOR
KHALILZAD TO SAUDI ARABIA

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Classified By: Ambassador James C. Oberwetter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The U.S. Mission to Saudi Arabia warmly welcomes your visit to Jeddah June 27. Ambassador Oberwetter and Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller look forward to meeting you and will accompany you on a number of your calls on Saudi leaders. Per your request, appointments are being requested in Jeddah with King Abdullah, Crown Prince Sultan, Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, Director of the General Intelligence Presidency, Prince Muqrin, and the Head of the National Security Council, Prince Bandar.

¶2. (S) Your visit to the Kingdom takes place at a time of relative internal stability but continuing concern over regional developments. Saudi leaders always look to USG visitors for assessments on regional security issues, especially with regard to Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The SAG shares most U.S. concerns about a range of regional issues, including Iran and Iraq, and is quietly pursuing initiatives to help promote political stability in Iraq and urge Iran to cooperate with the international community regarding its nuclear program. The February 24 terrorist attack on the Abqaiq oil facility came much closer to success than the SAG has been willing to acknowledge publicly, causing Saudi leaders to intensify internal security and counterterrorism efforts -- and to look to the U.S. for assistance. Recent visits by U.S. security and helicopter assessment teams were well-received by the Ministry of Interior (MOI).

¶3. (S) Your visit also comes during a time of some tension in U.S.-SAG relations. On the one hand, Saudi leaders have warmly welcomed a large number of senior USG visitors and confirmed the strength of the bilateral relationship. Counterterrorism cooperation remains strong and effective, and the importance of the U.S.-Saudi military relationship has been repeatedly reaffirmed by Saudi officials to visiting senior U.S. commanders. Recent Strategic Dialogue meetings in Washington went well, and the thousands of Saudis, especially students, now seeking U.S. visas offer clear evidence that we have progressed beyond the decline that followed 9/11. Nevertheless, obvious tensions exist. Saudi public opinion is on edge after the recent two suicides at Guantanamo, and the SAG is working with us to keep this matter low profile. Further, recent independent polling

shows an 11% approval rating for the U.S. among Saudis. While Saudi leaders do share U.S. concerns about Iran, Iraq, and other regional issues, there is a clear reluctance by the SAG to cooperate directly and openly with the U.S. to address them. Saudi leaders are very worried about nuclear proliferation, but they perceive a double standard in U.S.-driven pressure against Iranian nuclear weapons development and have argued instead for a nuclear-free Middle East that would include Israel. King Abdullah, who has in the past accused the U.S. of handing Iraq to Iran "on a golden platter," told General Abizaid May 13 that the U.S. regional and possibly world reputation was "broken."

Iraq

14. (S) In the June 6 meeting with U/S Edelman, King Abdullah asked if General Abizaid relayed his message to President Bush concerning engaging former Baathists in Iraq, and in part stated that "it would be very wise to co-opt the former Baathist elements into the new Iraqi government." The King and Crown Prince both expressed concern over what they perceived to be a growing Iranian threat, including their growing influence in Iraq, and questioned the wisdom of consulting with Iran about Iraq.

15. (S) Additionally, during the same visit, U/S Edelman met with the Assistant Minister of Interior for Security Affairs, Prince Muhammad bin Naif. Prince Muhammad raised several concerns regarding Iraq, including the transfer of Saudi detainees from Iraq to SAG authority as well as the recruitment of terrorists from Saudi Arabia to fight in Iraq. Regarding the transfer of detainees, U/S Edelman reiterated that both the SAG and the USG want the detainees to be transferred, but that the SAG needs to coordinate with the Iraqi government; Prince Muhammad acknowledged this need. He was concerned that the SAG is losing public credibility because the prisoners are not returning to the Kingdom.

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16. (S/NF) COMMENT: Overall, throughout discussions in recent months, senior SAG leaders have told us that the SAG is taking steps to promote Iraqi stability and unity, including encouraging the involvement of other regional governments and consideration of targeted media campaigns and humanitarian aid. The SAG believes that its support was critical to the increased participation of Sunni elements in the most recent elections but, in the face of continuing sectarian violence, Saudi leaders also likely believe there is little they can directly do to foster peace. They remain particularly sensitive about being perceived as supporting only the Sunni side, as this would damage their credibility with Shia Iraqis and put them in direct conflict with Iran. The Saudis are still hesitant to take major concrete steps on such issues as debt forgiveness and diplomatic representation (for security reasons). Saudi leaders have missed few opportunities since the December 15 Iraqi elections to convey to us their view that Iraq is now more susceptible to political instability and Iranian influence. Despite their willingness to quietly encourage Iraqi unity and stability, Saudi leaders, especially King Abdullah, have been very worried about the chances for success. Saudi leaders continue to worry that Sunni Takfiri insurgents in Iraq will eventually redeploy to Saudi Arabia just as they did after the Soviet-Afghanistan War and target the regime. END COMMENT.
OBERWETTER